

Submission, Silence, Mediocrity

AN INCIDENT IN MY ANCIENT philosophy class, perhaps insignificant in isolation, caused me to reflect upon the confusion and laziness facing us at Yale. We were discussing Plato's *Republic* and the famous banishment of the tragic poets. When Professor Allan Silverman, himself a radical and free-thinking academic, asked if the censorship bothered anyone, not a single student spoke.

maintained in a vigorous society mean so little?

Look around. Where can one find vitality? The spirit of hope and belief? As fall grudgingly gives way to winter, it seems that we are also resigning ourselves to a cultural stasis. The smiling superficiality gives us a sense of comfort, but unfortunately this does not mask a deeper pain or anguish, rather it simply exists as

The concern, however, has not yet become fear. Fear would require a close association with reality, and above all fear would drive men to action. Distanced from the world around them and incapable of action, people are not afraid. Motivation for change is crushed by the overwhelming belief that one man can no longer make a difference.

In this atmosphere the threat to poetry, free speech and change does not even affect us. We accept easily and submit. The idealistic dreams of youth sustained by naïveté and a certain pleasant illusion have vanished—but the loss of dreams has not even produced consciousness of a nightmare. In the absence of dreams, only a void of dull, motionless sleep remains.

Yale at its best should offer something more, an alternative to the desensitized state of affairs in the world. Here we live within an artificial microcosm—one which provides us with a myriad of activities in which to express our concerns for every issue from reproductive rights to the need for ethnic deans. Through these endeavors, we are able to place ourselves in the world, to engage ourselves with the people and institutions that surround us. Here, we have the opportunity to test our ideas against the criticism and scorn of our peers. A definite campus debate occurs constantly through speakers, various

publications and brief fits of activism. Why then do most students remain outside of these activities?

It is simply much nicer to conform and shun politics in the name of social niceties. Radicals at Yale are often viewed with disdain and confusion. Why, many students ask, would someone want to crawl out on a limb? Because out on that limb is the only place where one can stretch and scream and perhaps fall, hard. Unfortunately, most Yalies stay close to the stable trunk of the tree where they can stay with the crowd and feel safe and cozy. Gradually, however, they will realize that they no longer have the ability to express themselves. Any objection and deviation will be quickly squelched when living in such close quarters with other people. With the habituation to the mediocre, one's need for self-expression diminishes, and perhaps eventually vanishes.

From this viewpoint of voluntary silence, students find it easy to scoff at the proclivities of their louder peers. Perhaps they do not even realize that their opportunities for self-expression have been limited.

It is so easy to become trapped in the rituals of daily life. One attends classes, eats dinner at the prescribed time and then studies. The daily routine for most people is rarely disrupted by any of the activities occurring on campus. The unusual fails to gain recognition or appreciation because of the threat it poses to daily life. Being honest with oneself requires too great an effort, and causes discomfort and unrest.

So a mutually reinforcing culture of mediocrity perpetuates itself through the student body.

Unable to fully appreciate the consequence of the events of the day, most people find no reason for action in the world. Their lives never cross into the public realm, but instead remain confined to their private lives at home and at work. In this atmosphere, events lose their immediacy, and become merely entertainment, not engagement.

But students who fail to act are perhaps not much worse than those other students who become consumed by their activities. This danger occurs especially at Yale, where many activist students seem to lose all sense of perspective. One need only glance over a Women's Center table tent or count the proliferation of cultural awareness groups to see how wrapped up in the Yale world most students are. The recent hysteria, activism and coalition-forming that occurred in relation to the Chicano Dean is just one example of this phenomenon. Myths of sexual and racial oppression propagate themselves, create hysteria and finally lead to the formation of some whining new group. One can only hope to scream, "Perspective, just a little perspective, dahling!"

And so amidst the din, our voices must be heard. Censorship should bother us at the core of our being, because as individuals engaged in the world, we have something to say and we want someone to hear us.

Neomi Rao
Editor-in-Chief

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Usually students volunteer comments readily in this class, but censorship, a complex and potentially threatening issue, apparently required no further judgment. It seemed, most people said, that eliminating the poets made sense in light of Socrates' larger educational project. Not one Yalie objected to the elimination of the beautiful, sublime and emotional from the polis. Have we been so desensitized that we are not bothered by being ruled by another person? Is submission of the individual to the state and society the new norm? Do our freedoms

a hollow shell.

Our generation has been characterized with an annoying but damning "X." It seems we have neither soul, nor identity to mark our particular place in the world. Growing up in the prosperity of the eighties, life has been relatively easy for us. Politically, we have seen the end of communism and the much-purported success of free-market liberalism (now perhaps threatened most in our own country). Yet most people sense that something is missing. They express the forms of concern, but, like small children, have no means of relating its content.

EDITORIALS

Kicking the Scouts while they're down

YALE COLLEGE COUNCIL PRESIDENT MATTHEW BEREDO (ES'94) HAS INSIDIOUSLY USHERED IN A DANGEROUS NEW ERA in Yale student government history. Two weeks ago, the YCC voted to endorse a letter asking the Unitarian